



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 10, 2002

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ALIEN SMUGGLER SENTENCED TO MORE THAN 34 YEARS FOR HOSTAGE TAKING

PHOENIX, ARIZONA -- The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that on June 10, 2002, Aquileo Melchor-Zaragoza, 25, of Phoenix, AZ, was sentenced to 411 months in prison followed by five years supervised release, by United States District Judge James A, Teilborg, in Phoenix, Arizona.

Melchor-Zaragoza was convicted at trial where it was determined that he was a member of a gang of people who stole aliens at gunpoint from other alien smugglers. The gang, which was made up of six men and one woman, began stealing aliens in 1999. After the undocumented aliens were stolen, they would be transported to safehouse where they were kept until their families paid for their release. If the family member did not agree to pay for the hostage's release, the gang would threaten both the aliens as well as their families. During the entire ordeal, the gang would possess, carry, and brandish firearms. Altogether nine persons were charged for their involvement in this case, seven pleaded guilty, one went to trial, and one more is set for trial later this summer.

Melchor-Zaragoza was found guilty by a jury on March 20, 2002, of hostage taking, alien smuggling, conspiracy, and brandishing a weapon during and in relation to a crime of violence. After sentencing the defendant to serve more than 34 years, the judge comment on why he felt the sentence

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was appropriate. Judge Teilborg remarked that the case was “about money as a result of trafficking in human misery” and told Melchor-Zaragoza that he was “practicing your own form of terrorism.”

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The prosecution was handled by Lisa Jennis Settel, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona.

RELEASE NUMBER: 2002-101

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